THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

Report of the Commission of Inquiry: Israel's systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023

English Français العربية 中文 Русский Español

To learn more about Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council and the Question of Palestine, click here to visit the dedicated webpage.

13 March 2025, English only

Human Rights Council
Fifty-eighth session

"More than a human can bear": Israel's systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel

Summary

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel submits the present conference room paper to the Human Rights Council on the systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other gender-based violence by the Israeli Security Forces since 7 October 2023.
In the paper, the Commission examines Israel's widespread destruction of Gaza and the disproportionate violence against women and children resulting from Israel's method of war, including the targeting of residential buildings and the indiscriminate use of heavy explosives in densely populated areas. It describes the destruction of Palestinians through reproductive violence and harms resulting from the Israeli Security Forces' deliberate attacks on sexual and reproductive health care facilities and the collapsed health care infrastructure in Gaza.

The Commission also examines the sharp increase in sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by members of the Israeli Security Forces and settlers online and in person across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including rape and other forms of sexual violence. It also examines how sexual and gender-based violence has taken different forms when committed against male and female members of the Palestinian community in order to dominate, oppress and destroy the Palestinian people in whole or in part.

Israeli military operations

⚠ Israel Using Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War, says International Co...

XI. Conclusions

213. in Gaza have had a disproportionate impact on Palestinian women and girls, who continue to bear the brunt and pay the price for decisions made by those in power while themselves marginalised from decision-making and military and political power. The Commission notes in this regard the high and increasing number and proportion of female fatalities in Gaza, which is on an unprecedented scale, and the gender-specific harms related to a broad range of violations and crimes that have caused specific and serious bodily and mental harm to women and girls.

214. Israel has targeted civilian women and girls directly, acts that constitute the crime against humanity of murder and the war crime of wilful killing. Women and girls have also died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth due to the conditions imposed by the Israeli authorities impacting access to reproductive health care, acts that amount to the crime against humanity of extermination.

215. In addition to the disproportionate impact on women and girls as a result of intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects, specific gendered harms have been suffered as a result of starvation as a method of warfare, forcible transfer, extermination and collective punishment.

216. Israel's use of starvation as a method of war, the denial of humanitarian assistance and the concerted policy to destroy Gaza's healthcare system, compounded by the lack of water and access to sanitation facilities, have caused severe reproductive harms to women and girls, impacting all aspects of reproduction, including pregnancy, childbirth, post-partum recovery and lactation. Other reproductive harms include conditions that lead to the inability to manage postpartum-bleeding and menstruation hygienically and with dignity.

217. As primary caregivers, women have suffered gender-specific harms as a result of multiple displacements, deaths of children, separation of families and caring for sick and wounded family members. Pre-existing structural discrimination has also exacerbated controlling behaviours from male family members and has impacted women's and girls' freedom and agency.

218. Sexual and reproductive healthcare facilities have been systematically destroyed across Gaza, including maternity hospitals and maternity wards of hospitals and Gaza's main in-vitro fertility clinic. Israeli authorities deliberately destroyed such healthcare facilities rendering them non-functional, while simultaneously imposing a siege, and preventing humanitarian assistance at-scale, including necessary medications and equipment to ensure safe pregnancies, deliveries and neonatal care. Israeli authorities have implemented the systematic denial of approval for patients to exit Gaza and seek treatment elsewhere, including patients with gynaecological cancer. The Commission finds that the Israeli authorities have destroyed in part the reproductive capacity of the Palestinians in Gaza as a group, including by imposing measures intended to prevent births, one of the categories of genocidal acts in the Rome Statute and the Genocide Convention.

219. The harm for pregnant, lactating and new mothers is of an unprecedented scale in Gaza the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health care has caused immediate physical and mental harm and suffering to women and girls that will have irreversible long-term effects on the mental health and the physical reproductive and fertility prospects of the Palestinians in Gaza as a group. The underlying acts amount to crimes against humanity and deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of Palestinians as a group, one of the categories of genocidal acts in the Rome Statute and the Genocide Convention.

220. Israel has systematically used sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023. The Commission concludes that there has been a large increase in sexual and gender-based crimes perpetrated against Palestinians by members of the ISF since 7 October 2023, intended to retaliate

and punish them collectively for the attacks carried out by the military wing of Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in southern Israel on 7 October.

221. Palestinian men and boys have been subjected to specific persecutory acts intended to punish them collectively. The way in which these often-sexual acts are committed, including their filming, photographing and dissemination online, in conjunction with similar cases being documented in several locations, shows that forced public stripping and nudity, as well as sexualised torture and ill-treatment, are part of the persecutory attack against men and boys committed to punish, humiliate and intimidate Palestinian men and boys into subjugation.

222. Israeli detention is characterized by widespread and systematic abuse and sexual and gender-based violence. These practices have increased significantly in severity and frequency since 7 October 2023, following orders and statements of the Minister for National Security Ben Gvir who is in charge of prisons. The mistreatment of Palestinian detainees by Israeli authorities is a result of an intentional policy that utilises sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence to humiliate and degrade Palestinians in detention. This was observed across several facilities, temporary holding locations, during interrogation and while in transit.

223. The frequency, prevalence and severity of sexual and gender-based crimes perpetrated across the Occupied Palestinian Territory leads the Commission to conclude that sexual and gender-based violence is increasingly used as a method of war by Israel to destabilize, dominate, oppress and destroy the Palestinian people. The Commission documented a pattern of sexual violence, including cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture and other inhumane acts that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

224. Specific forms of sexual and gender-based violence such as forced public stripping and nudity, sexual harassment including threats of rape, as well as sexual assault, de facto form part of the ISF standard operating procedures towards Palestinians. The Commission concludes that these and other forms of sexualized torture, including rape and violence targeting the genitals, are committed with either explicit orders or an implicit encouragement by the top civilian and military leadership. The Commission found that all its documented incidents of sexual and gender-based violence committed by members of the ISF were met with impunity. Under these circumstances, the civilian and military leaders are as responsible for these crimes, as are the direct perpetrators.

225. The Commission's findings demonstrate a clear pattern of members of the ISF and settlers committing sexual and gender-based crimes aimed at instilling fear with the underlying intention to perpetuate Palestinian subordination and remove Palestinians from their land. The Commission therefore concludes that sexual and gender-based violence was intended not only to humiliate, punish and intimidate the individual Palestinians but the civilian population as a whole, with the objective to subordinate, destroy and expel the Palestinian community.

226. Sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence constitute a major element in the ill-treatment of Palestinians and, in the wider context, the unlawful occupation and the oppression of Palestinians as a group. Sexual and gender-based violence is used as a tool to further accentuate the

subordination of the occupied people, maintain the Israeli system of oppression and deny Palestinians the right to self-determination. The Commission affirms that these crimes must be addressed by tackling their root causes through ending the unlawful occupation as rapidly as possible, dismantling settlements and evacuating the settlers immediately, ensuring the right to return, ensuring restitution of property and land, paying reparations to Palestinians whose property cannot be restored, as well as dismantling the historically oppressive structures and institutionalized system of discrimination against Palestinians, as indicated by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion of July 2024.

To learn more about Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council and the Question of Palestine, click here to visit the dedicated webpage.

Document symbol: A/HRC/58/CRP.6
Download Document Files: https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Report-of-Independent-International-Commission-of-Inquiry-on-the-Occupied-Palestinian-Territory-13-March-2025.pdf
Document Type: Report
Document Sources: Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory
Country: Israel
Subject: Convention: Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention: Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention: Genocide, Gaza Strip, Gender, Genocide, Women, se

xual violence

Publication Date: 13/03/2025

Share This Page, Choose Your Platform!

RESOLUTIONS ON PALESTINE

General Assembly

Security Council

Human Rights Council

Economic and Social Council

PUBLICATIONS

Monthly Bulletin (Action by UN System and IGOs Relevant to Question of Palestine)

NGO Action News

Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem

The Status of Jerusalem

Studies prepared for and under the guidance of the Committee

EXPLORE THE UN

UN News Centre

About the UN

Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

Live UN Webcast

UN System and the question of Palestine

IN FOCUS

International Court of Justice and the question of Palestine